

As we come towards the end of the book of Colossians, Paul is showing us what it means to walk as a Christian, especially in opposition to worldly ideas. And in the previous section that we heard last week, Paul had been talking about what we should avoid, the things we shouldn't do as Christians. But this week is now focusing on what we should do, what it looks like to walk in Jesus Christ.

And I want you to notice something: how often Paul is talking about being at peace with one another as Christians. Because listen to what he says here in verse 12: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts." We are called to be compassionate with one another, to show mercy to one another, to care for one another. We are also called to put on "kindness," so that we are not angry with one another, so that we're not bickering with each other, but are kind towards one another in the Lord. We are called to put on "humility," to not consider ourselves to be the most important thing, but to count others as more significant than ourselves. We are called to put on "meekness," so that we are gentle and not harsh with one another as Christians. We are also called to put on "patience," so that we bear with one another, not always going after each other's little faults or sometimes even the big faults, but being patient towards one another, just as God is patient with us. We are also called to put on "love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony," so that we are at peace with one another. And above all, to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful." We are at peace as Christians with one another because of who we are in Jesus Christ.

And even the admonitions that he gives at the end of this reading all continue this same idea. So that when he says, "Wives, submit to your husband, as is fitting in the Lord," he is saying to not be quarrelsome, taking peace away from the family, but to live together in harmony with each other. Husbands are called to love their wives and to not be harsh with them, so that they are not trying to insist on their own way all the time or being overbearing, but loving your wife as Christ first loved the church. Children are called to obey their parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. To not be ignoring their parents or to be trying to do their own thing, but submitting to their parents in Christian love. Fathers are called to not provoke their children, so that they become discouraged, but to build them up so that they grow up in the fear of the Lord. Servants--or slaves, however you want to translate it--are also called to work for their earthly masters as for the Lord. Because in doing so, we are serving the Lord and not trying to be lazy or to have our own way, but to do what is pleasing in God's sight. And masters are also called to be just and fair with their servants, so that they are not being harsh towards them, but living in peace because they also have a master in heaven. In all of these things, Christians, in every circumstance, Paul is calling for us to be at peace with one another because we are Christians as one body in the Lord.

And the reason why he emphasizes this so much, I suspect, is probably because the Colossians were not at peace with one another. These false teachers who had come in caused them to look down on each other, caused them to be at war with one another so that there was no peace among them. But I think it's especially important because of what we see happening in the world. Because the world is full of division, Christians. The world doesn't have any kind of peace. In fact, all division that we see comes from the world, because there's no such thing as this kind of division in God. And you don't even have to try very hard, I think, to see the divisions going on

in our society today. After all, we live in a deeply divided society: politically, socially, in every single way. And in many cases people will treat one another as less than human, because they're on the other side. I don't even have to respect you. I don't have to listen to a thing you say, because you're opposed to me. We see this happening all the time in the world today. And we often see people insisting on themselves. I want my way above all, even to extreme costs! It doesn't matter what happens to anybody else. I'm going to do things the way I want. And because of that, the world becomes deeply divided. And I think that the Internet, and technology for that matter, hasn't helped anything. Because now you can be opposed to someone whom you're never even going to meet. I can go on the Internet and yell at somebody that I'm never going to see in the course of my life, and it'll make me feel better, at least, because hey, I was right, right? But that's the way that the world works, Christians. There isn't any peace in the world. All we see is division.

But how often does this worldly division also come into the church? Because it's not coming from the Lord. It is coming from the world, so that we become divided as the body of Christ. We have church members who are divided from each other, sometimes ignoring each other, not wanting to have anything to do with each other. Or sometimes they will bicker with one another or complain about something that somebody is doing or hasn't done. Maybe not even to their face. But it brings in all of this kind of division, all of this squabbling into the church. But let me ask you something, Christians. If that's the way that we are acting, if we are acting just like the world, what makes us different from the world? And if we're acting just like the world does, what is somebody on the outside going to think? What is somebody on the outside going to say? They're going to look at the church and say, "Well, it's nothing different. It's just the same old division, the same old fighting. So why would I want to be a part of that?" Because that's what happens when we have division inside the church, this kind of worldly division. It hurts the witness which we have in the world.

But Christians, we are not of the world. We are one body in Jesus Christ. And being the body of Christ, we are called to be at peace with one another. Notice that I didn't say being nice to one another. Because I think sometimes we use that word "nice" to cover over division. I'm going to be "nice" to somebody, and then when they're out of the room, I can tell them what I really think! No, this isn't about just being "nice." This is about being at peace with one another. Peace because we are in Christ. And when we have that real Christian peace which comes only from the Lord, then we will be united with one another. Then we will be patient with one another. Then we will forgive one another, because we belong to the Lord. And then "in all of these things, whatever you do," as Paul says, "in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." And when we are the Christians we are called to be in Christ, then we will do these things to the glory of God the Father, giving thanks to him in Jesus Christ.

So Christians, let us walk together as Christians. Not squabbling with one another, not fighting with one another, not bickering the way that the world does. But as Christ's one body, let us be united with one another. Because Jesus has forgiven you your sins. Jesus has given you the Holy Spirit to make you a part of that one body. Jesus has made you into one church by the shedding of his blood. So let us be like Jesus in all of these things, walking together in true Christian peace.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Holy Spirit to make us one body in your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us always to walk in him, in peace and in unity, knowing that all these things come from you alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.